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## **Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories**

Jack Whitehead

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### **Abstract**

The approach outlined below is focused on a living theory methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge from questions of the kind 'How do I improve what I am doing?' It also includes a new epistemology for educational knowledge. The new epistemology rests on a living logic of educational enquiry and living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) that include flows of life affirming energy with values that carry hope for the future of humanity.

The presentation emphasizes the importance of the uniqueness of each individual's living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) in improving practice and generating knowledge. It emphasizes the importance of individual creativity in contributing to improving practice and knowledge from within historical and cultural opportunities and constraints in the social contexts of the individual's life and work.

The web-based version of this presentation demonstrates the importance of local, national and international communicative collaborations for improving practice and generating knowledge in the context of globalizing communications. Through its multi-media representations of educational relationships and explanations of educational influence in learning it seeks to communicate new living standards of judgment. These standards are relationally-dynamic and grounded in both improving practice and generating knowledge. They express the life-affirming energy of individuals, cultures and the cosmos, with values and understandings that it is claimed carry hope for the future of humanity.

**Keywords:** Living Theory; Action Research; Methodology; Standards of Judgment.

## a) What is a living theory?

A living theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work.

### i) Why did I feel the need for a living theory?

In 1967, in my special study on my initial teacher education programme, on *A Way To Professionalism In Education* I wrote about the importance of a professional knowledge-base for education. In my later studies of educational theory between 1968-72 I began to see that the dominant view of educational theory, known as *the disciplines approach*, was mistaken. It was known as the disciplines approach because it was constituted by the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education.

The mistake was in thinking that disciplines of education could explain the educational influences of individuals in their own and in each other's learning. The error was not grounded in mistakes in the disciplines of education. The mistake was in the disciplines approach to educational theory. The mistake was in thinking that the disciplines of education, individually or in any combination, could explain adequately an individual's educational influence in their own learning and in the learning of others.

My recognition of this mistake between 1971-1972 came midway through my studies for a Masters degree in the psychology of education. As I was conducting a controlled experiment design for my dissertation on the way adolescents acquired scientific understanding, I began to feel a tension between an explanation that assumed individual learners could be validly represented in dependent and independent variables and an explanation I constructed for my educational influence that was grounded in my conscious lived experience. I also began to see that my explanations for my educational influences in the learning of my pupils could not be subsumed within any conceptual framework in the psychology of education or any existing discipline of education. This recognition re-focused my vocation. It moved from being a school teacher, teaching pupils science in secondary schools, to becoming a university academic and educational researcher, researching the creation and academic legitimation of valid forms of educational theory. Such theories could explain the educational influences of individuals in their own learning and in the learning of others. I believed then and still believe now that the profession of education requires such a professional knowledge-base.

My move to the University of Bath in 1973 was motivated by this desire to contribute to the creation and legitimation of educational theory. I continue to identify with the Mission of the University of Bath which includes having a distinct academic approach to the education of professional practitioners.

The damage inflicted on the teaching profession by the disciplines approach to educational theory may be judged from the fact that Paul Hirst, a main proponent, acknowledged a mistake in the following two quotations from 1983 where he says that much understanding of educational theory will be developed:

... in the context of immediate practical experience and will be co-terminous with everyday understanding. In particular, many of its operational principles, both explicit and implicit, will be of their nature generalisations from practical experience and have as their justification the results of individual activities and practices. (Hirst, 1983, p. 18)

The damage can be appreciated through Hirst's understanding that the practical principles you and I use to explain our educational influences in our own learning and in the learning of others *would be replaced* by principles with more theoretical justification:

In many characterisations of educational theory, my own included, principles justified in this way have until recently been regarded as at best pragmatic maxims having a first crude and superficial justification in practice that in any rationally developed theory would be replaced by principles with more fundamental, theoretical justification. That now seems to me to be a mistake. Rationally defensible practical principles, I suggest, must of their nature stand up to such practical tests and without that are necessarily inadequate. (ibid.)

The hegemony of the disciplines of education continues to dominate what counts as educational research. As Allender and Allender (2008) point out:

The belief that educational research trumps practice, historically and still, is one of the major obstacles. The results of scholarly inquiry have managed to become the top of a top-down world. The not-so-subtle message is that there is a better known way to teach and teachers ought to change their practices accordingly. And, teachers have a way of willingly participating in this system when they persist in searching for the new trick to quickly and magically make their teaching easier. Progress depends on giving up the hegemony of scholarly inquiry. Knowledge has many sources, and they are best honored when they are used as part of a lively dialectic. The obvious shift is for teachers to give themselves credit for having an expertise that is uniquely valuable to themselves, and others. (pp. 127-128)

Allender and Allender also believe that 'somewhere in history, the status of the teaching profession lost ground – setting up teachers to be viewed as incompetent. They believe that this view handicaps every teacher, and that there is a dire need to escape this undeserved status' (ibid., p. 128).

It may be, that by clearly distinguishing what counts as education research from educational research, in terms of new living standards of judgment, then valid forms of educational knowledge and educational theory could be legitimated in the Academy.

## **ii) Making a clear distinction between education research and educational research**

I am suggesting that education research is research carried out from the perspectives of disciplines and fields of education such as the philosophy, sociology, history, psychology, management, economics, policy and leadership of education. In my view, educational research is distinguished as the creation and legitimation of valid forms of educational theory and knowledge that can explain the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work.

This focus on the epistemological significance of what counts as educational knowledge has been highlighted by Bruce Ferguson (2008) where she notes that the increase in diverse perspectives and presentation styles in research are indicative of an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge (p. 24).

Stimulated to respond to Bruce Ferguson's point I claim that this epistemological transformation will require new forms of representation and educational standards of judgment in Journals of Educational Research (Whitehead, 2008a). In this contribution to EJOLTS I am directing attention to how the evidence, showing the nature of these forms of representation and living standards of judgment, can be accessed by those with the technology to do so. The evidence includes multi-media representations of flows of energy and values in the embodied knowledges of educators and their students. I recognize that the development of such representations costs money. Access to the most advanced technology of the day, with the use of communicative power of the internet, has economic implications.

My own research programme has benefited from access to this technology. I also acknowledge the influence of the economic context on my research programme in that I have held a tenured contract at the University of Bath with secure employment from 1973 to the end of the contract in 2009. I do not want to underestimate the importance of this economic security in my capacity to keep open a creative space at the University to develop my research programme.

In making a clear distinction between education and educational research and acknowledging the importance of technology and economics I also want it to be understood that I value the integration of insights from the theories from education researchers into my own living theories. For example, the historical and cultural contexts of my workplace are western and mainly white. These contexts are changing with multi-cultural and postcolonial influences (Charles, 2007; Murray 2007) questioning the power relations that sustain unjust privileges and the dominant logic and languages that sustain what counts as knowledge in the Western Academies.

In my early work between 1967-73 I followed this dominant logic and language. By this I mean that I used a positivist and propositional view of knowledge derived from the influence of my first degree in physical science. In my positivist phase I believed that controlled experimental designs gave access to the highest form of knowledge and that the theories generated from this approach should be presented within propositional statements about sets of variables that excluded contradictions. During the middle period of my research between 1977-1999 I extended my epistemological understandings to include dialectics (Ilyenkov, 1977) with its nucleus of contradiction. Since 2003 I have been exploring the implications of an epistemology of inclusionality (Rayner, 2004) which has much in common with African, Eastern and other indigenous ways of knowing (Bruce Ferguson, 2008). I want to stress again that this is not to imply a rejection of all my insights from propositional and dialectical theories. I continue to value insights from these theories as I deepen and extend my understandings of living educational theories and a living theory methodology with the evolution of the implications of asking, researching and answering 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

I will examine below the significance of these epistemological understandings of propositions, dialectics and inclusionality when I consider the use of a living theory

methodology in the processes of improving practice and in the generation of educational knowledge. In this process I follow Ryle's insight, '[e]fficient practice precedes the theory of it; methodologies presuppose the application of the methods, of the critical investigation of which they are the products' (Ryle, 1973, p. 31).

## **b) What is a living theory methodology?**

### **i) Using action reflection cycles as a method**

My understanding of action reflection cycles emerged from my practical question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' The method emerged before my awareness of its significance as a research question. I asked this question on my first day in 1967 as a science teacher in Langdon Park School, a London Comprehensive School. I felt a passion to help my students to improve their scientific understandings. In my first lessons I could see that my pupils were not comprehending much of what I was saying and doing. However, I did not feel my concern to be grounded in a 'deficit' model of myself. I felt a confidence that while what was going on was not as good as it could be, I would be able to contribute to improvements. My imagination worked to offer possibilities about improving what I was doing. I chose a possibility to act on, acted and evaluated the effectiveness of what I was doing in terms of my communications with my pupils. This disciplined process of problem-forming and solving is what I call an action reflection method.

### **ii) Developing an understanding of a living theory methodology**

A methodology is not only a collection of the methods used in the research. It is distinguished by a philosophical understanding of the principles that organize the 'how' of the enquiry. A living theory methodology explains how the enquiry was carried out in the generation of a living theory.

For example, my awareness of the importance of improving practice is grounded in my passion to see values of freedom, justice, compassion, respect for persons, love and democracy lived as fully as possible. Hence, in my living theory methodology, you should expect to see the meanings of these values emerge in the course of my practice. Because the expression of energy in the meanings of these values cannot be communicated using only words on pages of text, I will use video-data in a visual narrative to help with the public communication of these meanings.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of action research from action learning is that the researcher must make public the story of their research in a way that is open to others to evaluate its validity. A living theory methodology includes the processes of validation.

I work with Michael Polanyi's (1958) decision about personal knowledge. This is a decision to understand the world from my own point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising judgment responsibly with universal intent. I know that the local identity of my 'I' is influenced by the non-local flows of space and energy through the

cosmos. Yet I do work with a sense of responsibility for the educational influences I have in my own learning. I also recognise myself as a unique human being with this responsibility and I do exercise a sense of personal responsibility in validating for myself my claims for what I believe to be true. In doing this I take account of responses from a process of social validation I have developed from the ideas of MacDonald and Habermas.

Since 1976 I have used a process of democratic evaluation, described by MacDonald (1976), together with the four criteria of social validity proposed by Habermas (1976), to strengthen the personal and social validity of living theories. By this I mean that I submit my explanations of educational influence to a validation group of peers with a request that they help me to strengthen the comprehensibility, truthfulness, rightness and authenticity of the explanation. Within comprehensibility I include the logic of the explanation as a mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational (Marcuse, 1964, p. 105). Within truthfulness I include the evidence for justifying the assertions I make in my claims to knowledge. Within rightness I include an awareness of the normative assumptions I am making in the values that inform my claims to knowledge. Within authenticity I include the evidence of interaction over time that I am truly committed to living the values I explicitly espouse.

The social sciences have influenced what counts as educational research. Some researchers believe that educational research is distinguishable as a social science. I do not share this belief. My reasons are related to my meanings of educational and social where my meanings of educational cannot be subsumed within my meanings of social. Here are my meanings of social and educational to explain my understandings of some differences.

My meanings of 'social' in social validity, social action, social behaviour and social formations are influenced by the ideas of Habermas (1976) as described above, Schutz (1967) and Bourdieu (1990). I am most influenced in my meanings of social, social action and social behaviour by the work of Alfred Schutz in his *Phenomenology of the Social World*:

Following the logic of our own terminology, we prefer to take as our starting point, not social action or social behavior, but *intentional conscious experiences directed toward the other self*. However, we include here only these intentional experiences which are related to the other *as other*, that is, as a conscious living being. We are leaving out of account intentional Acts directed only to the other person's body as a physical object rather than as a field of expression for his subjective experiences. Conscious experiences intentionally related to another self which emerge in the form of spontaneous activity we shall speak of as *social behavior*. If such experiences have the character of being previously projected, we shall speak of them as *social action*. (Schutz, 1967, p. 144)

What I take from this is that a social action can be distinguished from social behaviour by the spontaneous activity in behaviour and the previous projection in an action.

In using the idea of social formations in such phrases as the 'educational influences in the learning of social formations' I want to distinguish educational influences in one's own learning and in the learning of others from the educational influences in the learning of a social formation such as a university. Because of cultural and historical influences in the social contexts in which we live and learn I want to acknowledge the importance of having an educational influence in the learning of such social formations. I know that the nature of meaning is complex, but I think we can work with the idea of educational influences in the



learning of social formations as being highly significant. For example when the University of Bath changed the regulations governing its social formation in 2004 to allow the submission of e-media I refer to this as an educational influence in the learning of a social formation. I think of it as an educational influence because it has extended the cognitive range and concerns of the forms of representation that can be used in the public communication of living educational theories.

I take the form of something to be fundamental in making sense of it. I need form to make sense. If something doesn't have a form I find that I cannot comprehend it. I use social formation in the sense used by Bourdieu in his point about the analysis of social formations in relation to the habitus:

The objective adjustment between dispositions and structures ensures a conformity to objective demands and urgencies which has nothing to do with rules and conscious compliance with rules, and gives an appearance of finality which in no way implies conscious positing of the ends objectively attained. Thus, paradoxically, social science makes greatest use of the language of rules precisely in the cases where it is most totally inadequate, that is, in analysing social formations in which, because of the constancy of the objective conditions over time, rules have a particularly small part to play in the determination of practices, which is largely entrusted to the automatisms of the habitus. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 145)

I want to be clear that I do not subsume the experience and expression of the life-affirming energy in my explanations of educational influences in learning to meanings of 'social'. My educational relationships are social in the sense that they can be distinguished as *intentional conscious experiences directed toward the other self* (Schutz, 1967, p. 144). However my explanations for my educational influences include the non-social flows of life-affirming energy that distinguish my social relations as educational.

Whilst expressing this life-affirming energy in my social relations I want to emphasise that I bring energy that flows from outside the social through the cosmos into my educational relationships. I use the expression of this energy in my accounts to distinguish what is educational from social relations. Hence I do not subsume my understanding of what is educational to a concept of 'social' in the improvement of practice and in the generation of knowledge. At the same time I recognise the importance of social relations in influencing my educational relationships.

## **c) Improving practice with a living theory methodology**

### **i) The importance of forming good questions**

I like the point made by Collingwood about the relationship between propositions and questions:

Whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, depends on what question it was meant to answer; and any one who wishes to know whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, must first find out what question it was meant to answer. (Collingwood, 1991, p. 39)



The questions we ask about our practice can be influential in what we do. For me, a good question for improving practice is, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' I found myself asking this question in the first lesson I taught in 1967. During this lesson I found myself feeling that I was not helping the pupils to improve their learning as well as I could. The question flowed with a life-affirming energy to do better. It flowed with the values and understandings of scientific enquiry and knowledge I brought into my work as a teacher of science.

Some 41 years after asking this question and asking, researching and answering it continuously in my research programme, I am still finding it a good question. It is at the heart of my focus on seeing what I can do to understand better how to enable the responses of educators to their pupils and students to be included in explanations of educational influence in learning. I am thinking of an educational influence that supports individuals to create their own living educational theories of their lives and learning as they seek to improve their practice.

## **ii) Using action reflection cycles in improving practice**

From the ground of a good question such as, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' I found my imagination worked spontaneously in generating ideas about how I might improve my practice. I consciously chose one possibility to act on and formed an action plan. I acted and evaluated the effectiveness of my actions. In 1967 I followed this action reflection cycle intuitively as I began my work in education and only made it explicit later (Whitehead, 1976).

Making it explicit helped me to see the importance of strengthening the data I collected to make a judgment on the effectiveness of my actions and understandings. Making it explicit also helped me to understand just how important it is, for the creation of valid explanations of educational influences in learning, to submit one's own interpretations to a validation group to receive the benefit of the mutual, rational controls of the inter-subjective criticism of others (Popper, 1975, p. 44).

## **iii) Using action reflection cycles in clarifying and evolving the energy-flowing and values-laden explanatory principles in generating knowledge about improving educational influences in learning.**

In the process of expressing concerns when values are not being lived as fully as they could be, imagining possible improvements, choosing a possibility to act on, acting and gathering data and evaluating the influence of actions, the energy flowing values used to distinguish what counts as an improvement are clarified and evolved. Clarifying these values is a necessary condition for judging whether improvements in learning are occurring. For example, at one time in my classrooms I felt that I was imposing too much structure on the lessons so that there was insufficient freedom to enable my pupils to engage in any enquiry learning that involved them forming their own questions. It was only by clarifying my understanding of enquiry learning and showing the development from a highly structured classroom to one that included the possibility of enquiry learning that I could clearly communicate what I meant by an improvement in learning (Whitehead, 1976).

**iv) Using responses from validation groups to enhance the imagined possibilities for improving educational influences in learning and for improving the gathering of data to make a judgment on the effectiveness of the actions.**

One of the best illustrations of this use of a validation group is in Martin Forrest's (1984) MA dissertation. As a tutor working in the continuing professional development of teachers Forrest supported teachers to help their pupils to improve their learning. Forrest researched his educational influence with a teacher in helping some primary aged children to think historically with objects from a Museum service. Another teacher working with similar age pupils from a different school did not believe this thinking to be possible. For his first validation meeting Forrest made claims to have influenced the practice of the first teacher but with insufficient evidence to convince the validation group of the validity of his claims. The validation group explained that they would need to see more conclusive evidence of his influence in the learning of a teacher and the pupils, than he provided in his initial narrative.

At a validation group some months later, Forrest produced video evidence in his explanation of his influence showing that the second teacher, on being shown a video-tape of what the first teacher was doing with her pupils, had tried the work with the historical artefacts. She found to her surprise that the pupils could think historically about the objects in a way that she initially had not thought to be possible. Forrest had documented his work with the second teacher. He had video-evidence from the classroom showing the pupils working with the artefacts and developing their historical thinking. His analysis with the video-data convinced the group of the validity of his claims to know his educational influences in the learning of the teacher and pupils.

Forrest shows how the primacy of practice and of improving practice is not separated from the generation of knowledge. Here is how a living theory methodology can assist in the generation of knowledge.

**d) Generating knowledge with a living theory methodology**

**i) The importance of forming good questions**

As with improving practice, generating knowledge relies on asking, researching and answering good questions. At the present time there is much work to be done on establishing the appropriate epistemology for evaluating the quality of claims to educational knowledge from within a living theory perspective. So, I think good questions in the present can be focused on the expression, clarification, evolution and legitimation of living standards of judgment.

## **ii) Using action reflection cycles in the generation of educational knowledge**

The generation of educational knowledge includes knowledge of a living theory methodology. In the story of the growth of my educational knowledge my most recent contributions have focused on the explication of a living theory methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge (Whitehead, 2009). In my analysis of an individual's educational development (Whitehead, 1985) I suggest that educational researchers adopt an action reflection form in generating a living form of theory:

The approach to educational theory I am suggesting we adopt, rests on a number of assumptions concerning both the idea of a 'living form of theory' and the personal and social criteria which can be used to criticize the theory. I use the term a 'living form of theory' to distinguish the suggested approach from the 'linguistic form' in which traditional theories are presented for criticism. In a living approach to educational theory I am suggesting that teacher action-researchers present their claims to know how and why they are attempting to overcome practical educational problems in this form:

I experience a problem when some of my educational values are negated in my practice.

I imagine a solution to my problem.

I act in the direction of my solution.

I evaluate the outcomes of my actions.

I modify my problems, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations. (p. 98)

In a living theory methodology the individual includes the unique constellation of values that are used to give meaning and purpose to their existence. In the course of the enquiry these values are expressed, clarified and evolved as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. The values flow with a life-affirming energy and are expressed in the relational dynamics of educational relationships.

One of the tasks, for those interested in spreading the educational influence and academic legitimization of living educational theories and a living theory methodology, is to find appropriate ways of representing the flows of life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles in narratives of educational influences in learning. It is to find appropriate ways of engaging in the boundaries of the power relations that are both resistant and supportive of the legitimization of living theories and living theory methodology. I have outlined above the tensions I experienced in my early studies of educational theory. The tensions arose because my practical principles were seen by adherents to the disciplines approach to educational theory as at best pragmatic maxims that had at best a crude and superficial justification in practice and which would be replaced in any rationally justified theory. Similar tensions continue because the majority of renowned and internationally recognized Journals of Educational Research continue to be text based rather than web-based and eliminate multi-media representations from their contents. Hence my tension in seeing that visual representations of flows of life-affirming energy with values are being eliminated from Journals of Educational Research.

**iii) Using multi-media representations to clarify and share meanings of the flows of energy in embodied values and their expressions in explanations of educational influence in learning.**

I am suggesting that we are all living with the capacity to express and develop a relationally-dynamic awareness of space and boundaries with life-affirming energy and value. However, I am also claiming that the dominating forms of representation used in Universities for explaining educational practices and influences in learning, remove valid expressions of this energy with values from the explanations. I am claiming that the forms of representation that dominate printed text-based media cannot express adequately, in the standards of judgment and explanatory principles of academic texts, the embodied values we use to give meaning and purpose to our lives in education.

I believe that the reason for this removal lies in the continuing tendency of academic theories to replace the practical principles used by individuals to explain their lives, by principles with justifications in abstract rationality. What I am saying we should be creating are educational theories from a perspective of inclusionality developed by Rayner and Lumley:

At the heart of inclusionality... is a simple shift in the way we frame reality, from absolutely fixed to relationally dynamic. This shift arises from perceiving space and boundaries as connective, reflective and co-creative, rather than severing, in their vital role of producing heterogeneous form and local identity...

To make this shift does not depend on new scientific knowledge or conjecture about supernatural forces, extraterrestrial life or whatever. All it requires is awareness and assimilation into understanding of the spatial possibility that permeates within, around and through natural features from sub-atomic to Universal in scale. We can then see through the illusion of 'solidity' that has made us prone to regard 'matter' as 'everything' and 'space' as 'nothing', and hence get caught in the conceptual addiction and affliction of 'either/or' 'dualism'. An addiction that so powerfully and insidiously restricts our philosophical horizons and undermines our compassionate human spirit and creativity. (Rayner, 2004)

I want to highlight the importance of understanding that, from a perspective of inclusionality, we are all included in the dynamics of a common living-space that flows with life-affirming energy. As Ted Lumley, one of the originators of the idea of inclusionality, points out about the importance of recognizing a 'pooling-of-consciousness'.

...an inspiring pooling-of-consciousness that seems to include and connect all within all in unifying dynamical communion.... The concreteness of 'local object being'... allows us to understand the dynamics of the common living-space in which we are all ineluctably included participants. (Lumley, 2008, p. 3)

Working with such a relationally-dynamic awareness of space and boundaries does not mean that everything is to be included in an undifferentiated mush. The living boundaries of cultures in resistance sometimes include the need for protection against damaging influences, especially those involving a lack of recognition (Whitehead, 2008c).

In learning how to combine our voices as practitioner-researchers in the generation and testing of living educational theories I am aware of the importance of including narrative

wreckage in the story of a life well-lived. I am thinking of the kind of narrative wreckage that involves a lack of recognition. A smooth story of self might initially feel comfortable to a listener, but without the acknowledgment of what has been involved in persisting in the face of pressure, a story can lack authenticity (Whitehead & Delong, 2008).

In my experience most lives involve some form of narrative wreckage in which difficulties have been encountered that require some effort in re-channelling destructive emotions into a flow of life affirming energy. I am thinking particularly of re-channelling destructive responses to a lack of appropriate recognition. I am thinking of the development of protective boundaries, in the face of such violations, that can continue to be open to the flow of life-affirming energy and values that carry hope for the future of humanity:

Human beings seek recognition of their own worth, or of the people, things, or principles that they invest with worth. The desire for recognition, and the accompanying emotions of anger, shame and pride, are parts of the human personality critical to political life. According to Hegel, they are what drives the whole historical process. (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xvii)

In overcoming and circumventing obstacles to the flows of energy with values of humanity I feel that two affirmations have been most significant in my practitioner-research:

The first affirmation is the experience of an energy that I feel is flowing through the cosmos. This energy is life-affirming for me and I associate this energy with the state of *being affirmed by the power of being itself*. When I read these words in Paul Tillich's work in *The Courage To Be* (1962, p. 168), I understood that this affirmation referred to a theistic experience in a relationship with God. Having no theistic desires myself I use the words 'state of being affirmed by the power of being itself' to communicate my experience of a flow of life-affirming energy that when combined with my values provides me with explanatory principles to explain why I do what I do. I believe that a similar energy is informing an Ubuntu way of being as this is expressed by Nelson Mandela and brought into the Academy by Eden Charles (2007) as a living standard of judgment in his doctoral thesis. I also identify this energy with Joan Walton's living standard of judgment in her doctoral thesis of 'spiritual resilience gained through connection with a loving dynamic energy' (Walton, 2008, Abstract).

The second affirmation is in relationships with others when mutual recognition evokes a flow of life-affirming energy. One event in which I experienced this affirmation was on the evening of Jacqueline Delong's graduation day on 18 December, 2002, when Peter Mellett led a celebration for Jacqueline in the Department of Education of the University of Bath. I believe that you will feel this affirmation 32 seconds into the video-clip when the laughter bursts out (Video 1).



**Video 1.** [Peter Mellett celebrating on Jacqueline DeLong's Graduation](#) (Whitehead, 2006a)

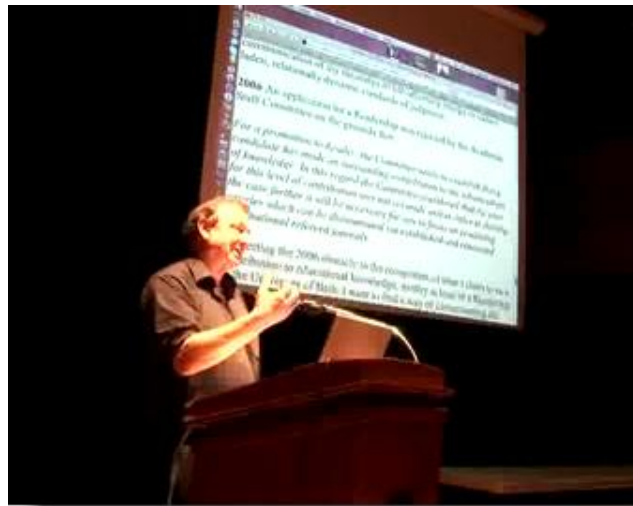
To communicate my meanings of the importance of a life-affirming energy and values such as academic freedom, pleasure, humour, love and justice in explanations of educational influence I shall use two multi-media representations. The first is a video of a keynote to the International Conference of Teacher Research in New York in March 2008 on *Combining Voices In Living Educational Theories That Are Freely Given In Teacher Research* (Whitehead, 2008b; 2008c). In presenting the keynote I felt that I was loving what I was doing. Such keynotes offer the opportunity to communicate ideas from my research programme that are directly related to what it has meant to me to live a loving a productive life in education. The following video-clip shows me using multi-media to explain the importance of visual representations to communicate flows of life-affirming energy and loving recognition in explanations of educational influences in learning (Video 2).



**Video 2.** [Jack Whitehead's Keynote ICTR 08 clip 1](#) (Whitehead, 2008e)



I am using the following video-clip (see Video 3 below) from the keynote to show a form of spiritual resilience gained through connection with a loving dynamic energy (Walton, 2008). The video shows me, to myself, responding to the living memories of most difficult experiences of my working life. In these responses I am hopeful that you experience the flow of loving energy with pleasure, humour and a passion for knowledge-creation that I feel distinguish my educational relationships and explanations of educational influence.



**Video 3.** [Jack Whitehead's keynote ICTR 08 clip 2](#) (Whitehead, 2008f)

As I watch this video-clip I see myself expressing a loving energy, pleasure, humour and understanding as I describe judgments from the University that generated the most difficult experiences of my working life. My purpose in including them in my accounts of my educational journey and knowledge-creation is to avoid presenting a smooth story of self that contains no narrative wreckage. In my experience of listening to many life-histories, everyone has encountered difficulties that have required spiritual resilience and a connection with a loving energy to move beyond the difficulties. Scholes-Rhodes has expressed her experience of spiritual belonging as a sense of 'exquisite connectivity'. She creates an 'intricate patterning of personal stories and dialogical inquiry process in forming a sense of coherence from the juxtaposition of emotional images with the clarity of a reflective and cognitive dialogue' (Abstract, 2002). The coherence I am seeking is one which includes emotional difficulties as 'exquisite connectivity' is broken, denied and re-established.

With the exception of the experience of 2006 described below I have documented most of the difficulties experienced over the 30 years between 1976-2006 in previous publications (Whitehead, 1993; 2004). They include a 1976 judgment by the University that I had exhibited forms of behaviour that had harmed the good order and morale of the School of Education. They include the 1980 and 1982 judgments that I could not question the judgments of examiners of my two doctoral submissions under any circumstances. They include the 1987 judgment that my activities and writings were a challenge to the present



and proper order of the university and not consistent with the duties the University wished me to pursue.

In 1990, based on this judgment about my activities and writings, as evidence of a prima facie breach of my academic freedom, Senate established a working party on a matter of academic freedom. They reported in 1991: 'The working party did not find that... his academic freedom had actually been breached. This was however, because of Mr. Whitehead's persistence in the face of pressure; a less determined individual might well have been discouraged and therefore constrained.'



**Video 4.** [Responding to matters of power and academic freedom](#) (Whitehead, 2006b)

Here is my re-enactment of a meeting with the working party where I had been invited to respond to a draft report in which the conclusion was that my academic freedom had not been breached; a conclusion I agreed with. What I did not agree with was that there was no recognition of the pressure to which I had been subjected to while sustaining my academic freedom. In the clip I think you may feel a disturbing shock in the recognition of the power of my anger in the expression of energy and my passion for academic freedom and academic responsibility. Following my meeting with the working party the report that went to Senate acknowledged that the reason my academic freedom had not been breached was because of my persistence in the face of pressure. This phrase, 'persistence in the face of pressure' is a phrase I continue to use in comprehending my meaning of Walton's standard of judgment of spiritual resilience gained through connection with a loving dynamic energy (Walton, 2008).

I have included this video-clip on the grounds of authenticity. To understand the educational significance of the video of my keynote of March 2008, in my explanations of educational influence, requires an understanding of the significance of the rechanneling of the energy in the anger in the above video. I expressed this rechanneling in the keynote. This rechanneling was related to a persistence in the face of pressure. This persistence was

possible through remaining open to the flows of loving dynamic energy in the passion for improving practice and contributing to educational knowledge.

Whilst much valuable learning can take place in response to difficulties I do want to emphasise the importance of the affirmations of those I have worked with in generating their own living educational theories, in sustaining my own passion for education. These affirmations, expressed most delightfully by Spiro in the story epilogue of her thesis *Learning and teacher as fellow travellers: a story tribute to Jack Whitehead* (Spiro, 2008, p. xv). [This](#) flows with a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility (Huxtable, 2008). These help to sustain my own loving relations and productive life in education.

One of the greatest difficulties I have experienced in remaining open to a flow of loving energy for education is in responding to a lack of recognition of my contributions to educational knowledge. This lack of recognition has been sustained over the 30 years 1976-2006 in judgments made about these contributions in the University. The latest judgment was in 2006 with the rejection of my application for a Readership on the grounds that I needed to develop my case further by focusing on producing articles which can be disseminated via established and renowned international refereed journals. Bruce Ferguson (2008), Whitehead (2008a), Laidlaw (2008), and Adler-Collins (2008) have all made a case in the British Educational Research Association Publication, *Research Intelligence*, to explain why the forms of representation in established and renowned international refereed journals need extending to include the new forms of educational knowledge being communicated through EJOLTS. EJOLTS is being established because the existing established and renowned international refereed journals are not providing appropriate forms of representation for the communication of living educational theories. Laidlaw's (2008) contribution is particularly significant in communicating meanings of living standards of judgment because she includes live urls, in the e-version of *Research Intelligence*. These take readers directly to the work of Branko Bogner (2008a; 2008b) with teachers and pupils in classrooms in Croatia, as well as to educational relationships with Moira Laidlaw's students in China.

We can all help each other, whatever age, to create our own living educational theories in which we account to ourselves for living our values and understandings as fully as we can. You can see at <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/mastermod.shtml> and at <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/living.shtml> the living theories of master and doctor educators that have been freely given for sharing through the internet, in the hope that they will contribute ideas that may be of value in the generation of your living theories as we combine our voices in enhancing our educational influences in improving our local and global contexts.

As I write I am feeling the pleasure of anticipation that this contribution will be accepted for publication in EJOLTS and hence become publically available. I am sharing these ideas with you in the hope that you will find something of value for yourself that resonates with your own life-affirming energy, values and understandings.

In conclusion I want to briefly focus attention on the importance of acting locally and publishing our ideas globally in ways that can support national and international collaborations.

#### **iv) Developing national and international collaborations for improving practice and generating educational knowledge**

My experiences of action researchers from different countries include action research workshops and presentations in China, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, The Republic of Ireland, South Africa, UK, USA and Canada. The workshops and presentations have helped me to recognise the importance of understanding the normative backgrounds of different cultures (Whitehead, 2008, c, f, g, h). I recognise that the emphasis placed on collective identities in China and Japan is different to the emphasis placed on individual identity in Australia, Ireland, UK, USA and Canada. Western views of democracy, which influence my own identity, have been questioned by Islamic scholars:

There exists in Islam a mechanism for consulting the believers, the Shura, which is an integral part of Islam. However, the system in Western democracy whereby the majority decides what is lawful and what is not, can never be acceptable in Islam, where the laws and framework of society are revealed by Allah and are unchangeable. (Abdul-Rahman, 1982, p. 35)

Whatever our socio-cultural history I believe that educators around the world have a responsibility to enhance the flow of values and understandings that carry hope for the future of humanity. This involves sharing our different understandings of what constitutes a good social formation and which values and understandings carry hope for the future of humanity.

For example, Jane Spiro (2008) in her research into knowledge-transformation engages with her own creativity as a creative writer, educator, manager and educational researcher. She holds herself to account in her thesis and research programme in relation to the values and understandings that she believes carry hope for the future of humanity. By making public her thesis with these values and understandings, in the flow of communications through web-space, Spiro is fulfilling one of the fundamental responsibilities of an educational researcher. I am thinking of the responsibility to engage in systematic enquiry that is made public. In her thesis, produced locally, through her research at Oxford Brookes University, Spiro explains how the embodied knowledge of a writer, educator, manager and researcher can be made public, in a distinct academic approach that includes the exercise of creativity and narrative enquiry in the generation of a living educational theory. This thesis is now available through the international communication channels of the internet (<http://www.actionresearch.net/janespirophd.shtml>). It is my belief that the insights in this thesis, about how to make public the embodied knowledge of a practitioner-researcher, will travel across cultural boundaries to captivate the imaginations and practices of others.

You can see how this kind of communication has already moved across cultural and national boundaries in the work of Dean Tian Fengjun and Professor Moira Laidlaw (Fengjun & Laidlaw, 2006) with their Colleagues, in China's Experimental Centre for Educational Action Research in Foreign Languages Teaching, at Ningxia Teacher's University. The action researchers at Ningxia Teachers University are developing a collaborative approach to living theory action research with Chinese characteristics. You can access the living theories of teachers and students about their learning and implementation of the New Curriculum at

Ningxia Teachers University from <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/moira.shtml>. You can also access some of my suggestions for international collaborations in the development of collaborative living educational theory action research in China from <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/jack/jwkeynotechina8june08.pdf>.

Dr. Margaret Farren and her colleague Yvonne Crotty at Dublin City University are evolving a living theory action research approach for improving practice and generating knowledge with information and communications technology. Dr. Farren is a lecturer in e-learning at Dublin City University who is working to support international collaboration with the [Action Research Collaboratory](#) and the [e-Life Connecting People Project](#).

Professor Jean McNiff has been most influential through books, workshops and conference presentations in spreading the influence of a living theory action research approach. This influence can be seen particularly through her work in South Africa (Wood, Morar & Mostert, 2007), in Ireland, Iceland, Canada and in the UK.

I want to end with references to two photographs from graduation ceremonies in 2008 from Limerick University and the University of Bath to symbolize the spreading global influence of the living theories of individuals produced in their local contexts.

In a [picture](#) taken in January 2008 (University of Limerick, 2008) Jean McNiff is in her doctoral robes from the University of Bath celebrating the success of Margaret Cahill and Mary Roche on their graduations with their living theories doctorates<sup>1</sup> from the University of Limerick. The symbolism of the robes in relation to ideas travelling through national boundaries is that ideas generated by McNiff in her doctoral research programme at the University of Bath have been integrated in the living theory doctorates of Cahill and Roche at the University of Limerick.

Jean McNiff has supervised three other living theory doctorates (Glenn, 2006; Sullivan, 2006; McDonagh, 2007), to successful completion at the University of Limerick with graduations in 2006 and 2007 and more are on the way. The explicit embrace of enhancing the expression of the values of social justice and holistic educational practice, in the theses, provide evidence of an educational engagement with issues of power and privilege in society.

Figure 1 below shows myself on the left, with Jane Spiro and Je Kan Adler Collins on their graduation with their doctorates on the 25 June 2008. We three are alumni of the University of Bath. Ideas from my research programme have been integrated within the theses of Spiro and Adler-Collins as they generated their own original living educational theories. Adler-Collins' research programme involved the development, implementation and evaluation of a curriculum for the healing nurse in a Japanese University. Spiro's research programme includes family history from Poland where in Chapter 4 of her thesis on *Writing as finding a voice: From Finchley to Lithuania*. She writes: 'This chapter explores my novel-writing process, the struggle to understand the actual life stories/histories of those I grew up

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Cahill's (2007) thesis is on *My Living Educational Theory Of Inclusional Practice*, and Mary Roche's (2007) thesis is on [Towards A Living Theory Of Caring Pedagogy: Interrogating My Practice To Nurture A Critical, Emancipatory And Just Community Of Enquiry](#).

with, and to honour this specificity, at the same time as transforming it symbolically into a larger, and “universal” story’ (Spiro 2008, p. 82).



**Figure 1.** Jack Whitehead, with Jane Spiro and Je Kan Adler Collins on Graduation Day

The image brings back the memory of the expression of life-affirming energy, pleasure, hope and friendship between us. The supervision relationship has now changed to one of doctoral colleagues in our three universities who are supporting each other in our post-doctoral research. The process of researching our actions locally and publishing our research globally continues with the extending interconnecting and branching channels of our communications. I do hope that you will feel moved to contribute your own living educational theory to our educational journeys in our shared living space.

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